



News Release

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Kindergarten vaccination data show some children are at risk of disease

Number of students with out-of-compliance immunization records still high

OLYMPIA — Washington kindergarteners may be at increased risk of preventable diseases, according to data released by the state Department of Health this week.

New statewide data for the 2014-2015 school year show many [kindergarteners don't have documented vaccinations or vaccine exemptions](#). Although most students come to school vaccinated, the [increased number of children lacking the proper documentation](#) is a concern, especially in view of recent outbreaks of preventable diseases.

“Recent outbreaks of serious diseases like whooping cough and measles make it even more important to keep kids vaccinated,” said State Health Officer Dr. Kathy Lofy. “When school nurses and staff don’t know which kids have had their shots, it’s much harder to manage a disease outbreak and more dangerous for students and their families.”

Nearly 11 percent of Washington kindergarteners don’t have up-to-date immunization information on file with their school.

Schools across the state report immunization coverage each fall to the state Department of Health. The data give a snapshot of rates at the beginning of the school year. Kindergarten is the first entry into the school system for many children, so kindergarten rates are considered the benchmark for school vaccination data. More schools turned in reports this year than in past years; however, the rate of missing immunization information increased.

“Vaccination is the norm for families across Washington,” said Secretary of Health John Wiesman, “and we want to continue to support parents to get the right shots at the right time to fully protect kids and schools.”

Along with the continued decline in up-to-date records for kindergarteners, there has also been a slight dip in the number of students who have all required shots documented when they arrived at school in the fall. Statewide data show the figure is at about 83 percent. The national and state goal is 95 percent vaccinated for each individual vaccine to ensure diseases don't spread quickly to other children. None of the individual vaccines required for school meet this goal.

Exemption rates for kindergarteners remained steady at 4.5 percent this school year. These students have opted out of vaccinations due to medical, personal, or religious reasons.

Washington has historically had high exemption rates for kindergarteners. Rates have come down since they peaked in 2008, but the improvement has leveled-off for the past few years. Increasing immunization coverage and lowering exempt and out-of-compliance students continues to be the focus of state and local health officials.

In Washington, all recommended vaccines are available at no cost for kids through age 18 from health care providers across the state. Although providers may charge an office visit fee and an administration fee for the vaccine, a family that can't afford to pay can ask their regular provider to waive the administration fee.

For help finding a health care provider or an immunization clinic, call your local health agency, visit the [ParentHelp123 resource finder](#), or call the Family Health Hotline at 1-800-322-2588.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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